

The University of Chicago

THE PROBLEM OF CIVILIZATION
IN ENGLISH ABOLITION LITER-
ATURE, 1772-1808

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR
OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1934

By
RICHARD MORGAN KAIN

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By RICHARD M. KAIN

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The widespread opposition of English literary men to the slave trade during the last two decades of the eighteenth century has long been recognized as an important phase of the humanitarianism of the period, but its ideological implications have remained unstudied.¹ To the historian of eighteenth-century ideas the episode has special significance, for the negro question dealt directly with the problems involved in the contact of the civilized and the savage mind, and hence brought into focus the conflicting elements of primitivistic and progressivistic thought so characteristic of the period.

Granville Sharp's victory in the Somerset Case in 1772 aroused popular sympathy for the negro, and directed the attention of the public to the brutalities of the carrying trade. Literary men soon took up the question. John Wesley, Thomas Paine, John Newton, and Joseph Priestley were among those who wrote pamphlets on the "negro cause";² abolition poetry appeared in profusion in the magazines. "If you hear slave ballads sung in the street," Cowper wrote in 1788, "they are probably mine."³ William Blake contributed ten pounds to the work of the abolition committee, and included "The Little Black Boy" in his *Songs of Innocence* (1789). The efforts of Cowper, Mrs. Barbauld, Burns, Coleridge, Rogers, Southey, Bowles,

¹J. Clarkson, *The History . . . of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* (1808) is the standard history. F. J. Klingberg, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in England* (1926) is the most recent study. The best analysis of the ideology of the problem of civilization is L. Whitney, *Primitivism and the Idea of Progress in English Popular Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, 1934.

²John Wesley, *Thoughts on Slavery* (1774); Thomas Paine, *On African Slavery* (1774); John Newton, *Thoughts on the African Slave Trade* (1788); Joseph Priestley, *A Sermon on the Slave Trade* (1788).

³*Letters*, ed. Wright (1904), III, 252.

Campbell, Hunt, Opie, and Wordsworth testify to the reverberations of this dispute in the literature of the day.⁴

The aspect of this literature which is of greatest interest to the historian of ideas is the discussion of the intellectual and moral capacities of the negro. This discussion brought out several conflicting strains of thought regarding that very popular question of the Enlightenment—the problem of civilization. Earliest in appearance, and perhaps foremost in popularity, was the primitivistic idealization of the negro. Primitivism had become so popular with the reading public by 1772 that the best method of gaining an audience for abolition propaganda was to turn to these commonplace, though inappropriate and outmoded points of view. Serious advocates of abolition were somewhat discomfited by the effusions of primitivistic writers, however, as is evidenced by the plea of the author of the *Short Sketch of the Evidence* (1792) that his account “unembellished by flourishes of rhetoric” be read instead of the preposterous exaggerations “in the form of the ‘Dying Slave,’ or ‘The Negro’s Complaint’” which, he admitted, possessed “powers to attract their willing attention, and to win their sympathetic regard.”

I

An interesting combination of most of the popular primitivistic themes is to be found in the “dying negro” poems, the popularity of which was amazing.⁵ As the slave ship departs from Africa the

⁴Cowper, *Charity* (1782), 137-47; *The Task* (1785), II, 12-48; *The Negro's Complaint* (1788); *The Morning Dream* (1788); *Sweet Meat Has Sour Sauce* (1788); *Pity for Poor Africans* (1788); *Epigram* (1789); *Sonnet to Wilberforce* (1792). Barbauld, *Epistle to Wilberforce* (1791). Burns, “The Slave's Lament” (1792). Coleridge, “Greek Prize Ode on the Slave Trade” (1792). Rogers, *Pleasures of Memory* (1792), II, II, 45-50. Southey, *Slave Trade Sonnets* (1794); “To the Genius of Africa” (1795); “The Sailor . . . in the Slave Trade” (1798). Bowles, “The Dying Slave” (1798). Campbell, *Pleasures of Hope* (1799), 330-340. Hunt, “The Negro Boy” (1802). Opie, “The Negro Boy's Tale” (1802); “The Lucayan's Song” (1808). Wordsworth, “To Tous-saint l'Overture” (1807); “We Had a Female Passenger” (1807); “To Thomas Clarkson” (1807).

⁵One of the earliest was Day, *The Dying Negro* (1773). For other dying negro songs see *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXX (1791), 1046; LXXII (1792), 652; LXXIII (1793), 749; CVI (1809), 1149. *Universal Magazine*, LIII (1773), 153; LXI (1777), 270; scvii (1795), 347; ci (1797), 43. *Monthly Mirror*, iv (1797), 51, 286; xi (1801), 45-6; xxiii (1807), 252-3. *Edinburgh Magazine*, x (1789), 286; xiv (1791), 424. *Lady's Magazine*, xxxii (1801), 159. *European Magazine*, xxii (1792), 303-306; xxxiv (1798), 259. *Scots Magazine*, lxxi (1807), 847. *Monthly Literary Recreations*, II (1801), 104. One appearance only is cited; many poems appeared three or more times.

valiant savage yearns with regret for a glimpse of his loved one, and looks back sadly upon the joys of savage life. Overcome with emotion, he bursts into verse which is supposed to possess all the spontaneity and power of the poetry of nature. After expressing his feelings in this fashion, he resolves to plunge into the sea, choosing to suffer death rather than to face the prospect of a degrading servitude, and dying in the hope of once more returning to his happy hunting ground in Africa. Stoic resolution, depth of feeling, joy in the exotic life of the savage, love of liberty, natural poetic genius—the most popular primitivistic virtues are united in the dying negro.

The courage of the African was shown in his occupations of hunting and of war, but was perhaps more frequently expressed in descriptions of his patience in servitude or of his heroic suicide. The hero of Bowles' "African" (1799) sent word to his comrades in Africa that he endured slavery with fortitude:

tell them that we murmur not—
Tell them, though the pang will start,
And drain the life-blood from the heart—
Tell them, generous shame forbids
The tear to stain our burning lids!⁶

But in no more striking fashion were the bravery and courage of the negro shown than in his resolution to die rather than to submit to slavery. The qualities of "fiery passion" and "desperate resolution," which, the *Monthly Review* asserted in 1772, "so strongly mark the negro's general character,"⁷ became a stock in trade for the versifiers of the abolition movement. To select only one typical example, the anonymous "Negro's Complaint" concluded as follows:

"But, sooner than suffer their chain,
To death I will cheerfully fly
And free me from sorrow and pain:
For Orra alone now I sigh.

"To P'Shapon, my god, I return
That Spirit which to me he gave.
For freedom and death now I burn"—
So saying, he plung'd in the wave.⁸

Stoicism was one of the foremost of negro virtues, one of the aboli-

⁶Fairchild, *The Noble Savage* (1928), p. 467, notes a resemblance to the "Death Song" in Frank Sayers, "The Dying African," *Poems* (1792).

⁷XXXIX (1773), 237.

⁸*Lady's Magazine*, XXIII (1792), 101.

tionists asserting that it was "equal, if not superior, to philosophic fortitude, or Christian resignation."⁹

The negro was also a man of feeling. George Colman, in his play *The Africans* (1789), gave an account of the negro character which combined stoic and sentimental qualities:

His frame, robust and pliant, boasts a nature
Well suited to it, for 'tis bold yet yielding—
Fierce to his foe as panther's. But the dove,
Who wings her anxious journey home with food,
Returns not to her young with more delight,
Than he comes laden to his family.
The strong, but generous sovereign of the woods,
And the spring lamb that frolics on the green,
Have mingled both their qualities in him.¹⁰

Among the gentler qualities of the negro were filial reverence, respect for the aged, compassion for the unfortunate, benevolence, love, and hospitality, in all of which, James Beattie averred, "he has sometimes given proof of such generosity as would do honour to any hero of romance."¹¹ The quality of hospitality became proverbial, and the account of Mungo Park's reception in Africa almost achieved the dignity of a classic.¹² Park related that he was graciously received in a negro village by women who chanted to him an extemporaneous song, the air of which was "sweet and plaintive" and the words were: "the winds roared, and the rain fell—The poor white man, faint and weary, came and sat down under our tree—he has no mother to bring him milk; no wife to grind his corn." Georgianna Cavendish, in a postscript to the 1799 edition of Park's *Travels*, versified this tale in a manner in which, Park stated, "the plaintive simplicity of the original is preserved and improved":

The loud wind roar'd, the rain fell fast;
The White Man yielded to the blast:
He sat him down, beneath our tree;
For weary, sad, and faint was he;
And as, no wife, or mother's care,

⁹Robert Renny, *History of Jamaica* (1807), pp. 166-167.

¹⁰Cumberland, *British Theatre* (1843), XLIII, 11.

¹¹*Elements of Moral Science* (1793), *Works* (1817), I, 44.

¹²Park, *Interior of Africa* (1799), Pinkerton, *Voyages* (1811), xvi, 844. Quoted in *New Annual Register*, XLII (1799), 50; *Concise Statement of the Question* (1804), pp. 103-4. Georgianna Cavendish, "A Negro Hymn," quoted in *Annual Register*, XLV (1799), 457-458; *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXXV (1799), 510. Cf. also James Montgomery, "West Indies" (1808), III, 100-110, *Poems on Abolition* (1808).

For him the milk or corn prepare.
The White Man, shall our pity share;
Alas, no wife or mother's care,
For him the milk or corn prepare.

The extemporaneous nature of this song impressed Park, but the incident was only one of many examples of the innate poetic genius of the African—for the negro was a natural bard, in accordance with the primitivistic formula. African poetry was frequently printed in magazines,¹³ the *Lady's Magazine* stating in 1787 that one excerpt showed to what heights "sensibility, guided by nature alone, can elevate the uncultivated mind."¹⁴ The soliloquies of the dying negroes were supposed, of course, to be examples of primitive poetry, and not infrequently these soliloquies were given in broken English.¹⁵ The poetic genius of the African was apostrophized in Samuel Pratt's ambitious philanthropic poem, *Humanity* (1789):

Musicians, Poets, too, by nature taught,
As transient objects transient themes supply,
Swift into measure subjects seem to fly,
As transient objects transient themes supply
Each nerve extatic springs to the rebound,
And every motion seems to paint a sound.¹⁶

The African, then, was capable of courage, affection, hospitality, and poetic inspiration, to a greater degree than was the civilized man. But sexual passion, chaste though ardent, was the most compelling of all primitive sentiments. As Monsieur de Chanvillon, a historian of Martinique, rather eloquently put it:

Love, the child of nature, to whom she entrusts her own preservation; whose progress no difficulties can retard, and who triumphs even in chains; that principle of life, as necessary to the harmony of the universe, as the air which we breathe, inspires and invigorates all the thoughts and purposes of the negro.¹⁷

Through the many tales of savage love recounted by poets and pamphleteers the public came to believe that the negroes "feel the pas-

¹³*New Lady's Magazine*, II (1787), 586; *Monthly Mirror*, I (1795), 89; *Scots Magazine*, LVII (1795), 846; *Monthly Magazine*, II (1796), 449-451.

¹⁴*New Lady's Magazine*, II (1787), 586.

¹⁵Fairchild noted four instances, *The Noble Savage* (1928), p. 475. Additional examples are "A Negro Love Elegy," *Hibernian Magazine* (1790), 471; "The Poor Negro Beggar's Petition," *The Bee*, II (1791), 63; "The African's Complaint," *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXXIII (1793), 215-216; Amelia Opie, *The Negro Boy's Tale* (1802); "Negro Philosophy" from Dibdin, *Britannic Magazine*, VII (1800), 268.

¹⁶In Pratt, *Gleanings* (1797), p. 422.

¹⁷Quoted in Edwards, *History of the West Indies* (1793), 1819 ed., II, 98.

sion of love in all its excess, and enjoy it in all its refinement" as the *Weekly Magazine* stated in 1782.¹⁸ William Roscoe, in his picture of African life, asserted that

where nature reigns,
And universal freedom, love exults
As in his native clime; there aims secure
His brightest arrow, steep'd in keen delights
To cultur'd minds, and colder skies, unknown.¹⁹

The negro, an uncorrupted man of nature, endowed with the virtues of courage, nobility, and sentiment, dwelt in a land pictured as grand though terrible, abounding in scenes of awe-inspiring beauty, and filled with a profusion of tropical fruits and luxuriant vegetation. Life there was carefree and unrestrained. Africa was, indeed, as Drury, Adanson, and other early travellers had pointed out, a terrestrial paradise. The imaginations of the poets were captivated by the sterner aspects of African scenery, and the genius of the dark continent was invoked in romantic terms. Thus Stanfield addressed the spirit of Africa in the opening lines of his *Guinea Voyage* (1789):

High, where primeval forests shade the land,
And in majestic, solemn order stand,
A sacred nation raises now its seat
O'er the loud stream, that murmurs at its feet,
Of *Niger*, rushing thro' the fertile plains.
Swell'd by the cataracts of tropic rains,
Long 'ere surcharg'd his turgid flood divides,
To burst on ocean in three thund'ring tides.
Thither high-seated in an iv'ry car,
Glitt'ring with gold express'd in many a star,
By alligators drawn in dread array,
Afric's aerial empress bends her way.²⁰

Montgomery added more details to the picture, and enlarged upon the terrifying aspects of wild scenery:

Where the stupendous Mountains of the Moon
Cast their broad shadows o'er the realms of noon;
From rude Caffraria, where the giraffes browse,
With stately heads, among the forest boughs,
To Atlas, where Numidian lions glow
With torrid fire beneath eternal snow;
From Nubian hills that hail the dawning day,
To Guinea's coast where evening fades away,
Regions immense, unsearchable, unknown,

¹⁸XV (1782), 356.

¹⁹*Wrongs of Africa*, I (1787), 12.

²⁰P. 12.

Bask in the splendour of the solar zone;
 A world of wonders,—where creation seems
 No more a work of Nature but her dreams;
 Great, wild, and beautiful, beyond control,
 She reigns in all the freedom of her soul.²¹

In Africa, as in the blessed isles of the Pacific, the fruits of the earth sprang forth in profusion, requiring little human effort. The curse of labour seemed to be lifted from man, who lived as in the Golden Age. Africa seems "a terrestrial paradise" wrote the *Monthly Review* in 1802:

Vessels anchor on the open coast with perfect safety . . . and the heat of the day is always tempered by the sea-breeze. The rivers and lakes are said to abound with fish; the mountains, covered with wood, are full of game . . . and the earth voluntarily yields those products which elsewhere are drawn from it by labour.²²

Or, as a later review in the same magazine declared, the negroes are "amongst the most favored people of nature."²³ One ardent sentimentalist even went so far as to glorify the Hottentots, although he admitted some intellectual deficiencies. "But what signifies the mind's being vacant, if the heart be full, and if the sweet emotions of nature agitate it?" he triumphantly concluded.²⁴

The idyllic life of the African occupied an important place in abolition poetry, the slaves either looking back regretfully upon their happy lives in their native land, or aspiring to return to that blessed existence after death. One African remembered his former life in the manner of the eighteenth-century poems of retirement:

Of Afric's shore, by partial fortune thrown,
 Where polished art and manners where unknown,
 Where each unshackled as the feather'd race,
 For food we div'd or urg'd the doubtful chase,
 Full many a year with calm content I dwelt,
 For nature's wants were all the wants I felt;
 There had I hoped to spend life's little day,
 And bask beneath the sun's meridian ray;
 To clasp one sable damsel as my own,
 And live and die unnoticed and unknown.²⁵

²¹"West Indies," *Poems on Abolition* (1808), II, 41-66. See also James Gra-hame, "Africa Delivered," *ibid.*, I, 1-16.

²²XXCVII (1802), 451.

²³XLVII (1805), 280.

²⁴*Gentleman's Magazine*, XLV (1775), 168.

²⁵"The African's Appeal," *Monthly Mirror*, III (1797), 367-8.

Bowles' "African" stated the usual hope of the slave to return to Africa after his suicide, there again to indulge in an ideal life:

Swiftly, brother, wilt thou ride
O'er the long and stormy tide,
Fleeter than the hurricane,
Till thou view those scenes again,
Where thy father's hut was rear'd,
Where thy mother's voice was heard;
Where thy infant brothers play'd
Beneath the fragrant citron's shade;
Where through green savannahs wide
Cooling rivers silent glide, . . .
Where the dance, the festive song,
Of many a friend divided long,
Doom'd through stranger lands to roam,
Shall bid thy spirit welcome home!
Fearless o'er the foaming tide
Again thy light canoe shall ride;
Fearless on th' embattled plain
Thou shall lift thy lance again;
Or, starting at the call of morn,
Wake the wild woods with thy horn;
Or, rushing down the mountain-slope,
Overtake the nimble antelope;
Or lead the dance, 'mid blissful bands,
On cool AndRACTE's yellow sands.²⁶

Perhaps the final test of primitivistic ardour would be found in the attitude of abolitionists toward the physical appearance of the negro. In general, comments upon negro beauty were restricted to his physique,²⁷ although Thomas Street's *Aura* had a skin which "with ebony or jet might vie,"²⁸ and the French *Selico* (1791) described its hero as the "blackest, the best made" of his race.²⁹ The usual attitude of English writers was that the true beauty of the negro is not physical, but spiritual. John Jamieson asserted in his *Sorrows of Slavery* (1789) that the negro is beautiful, if beauty's essence lie

In framing to the comparative eye
Th' eternal image of a lovely soul,
Pure, noble, piteous and benevolent.³⁰

²⁶*Britannic Magazine*, vi (1798), 346.

²⁷Day, *Dying Negro* (1773), Bell, *Fugitive Poetry*, vii, 137; *Weekly Magazine*, iv (1782), 355-8, 390-3; Street, *Aura* (1788), p. 12; Campbell, *Pleasures of Hope* (1799), *Works* (1845), p. 44; Rainsford, *Hayti* (1807), pp. 234-5; Gregoire, *Moral and Intellectual Faculties of Negroes* (1807), pp. 37-8.

²⁸P, 12.

²⁹*Edinburgh Magazine*, xvii (1793), 142.

³⁰*European Magazine*, xvii (1790), 199-200. See also Adair, *History of the American Indians* (1775), p. l. Ramsay, *Treatment and Conversion* (1784), pp. 203-204; "The African's Appeal," *Monthly Mirror*, iii (1797), 367, 368.

Or, in "The Little Black Boy," the finest poem of the abolition movement, color is regarded as accidental and temporary:

"And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Are but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

Thus most of the principal aspects of primitivistic thought appeared in abolition poetry, although the primitivism of the abolitionists was usually motivated by ulterior purposes. By portraying the negro as a man of sensibility and virtue three of the popular excuses of the pro-slavery writers could be refuted: that the negro was not sensitive to slavery; that he was happier in slavery than in the barbarous land from which he was taken; and that he was morally and intellectually inferior to the white man.³¹

First, if the negro could be shown to be a man of feeling, the sorrows of slavery were real indeed. The emphasis upon the mental and physical sufferings of the slave in abolition poetry is apparent; characteristic titles—"The Slave's Lament," "The Negro's Complaint," "The Sorrows of Slavery"—indicate its use. Samuel Pratt's poetic catalogue of negro virtues in his *Humanity* (1789) was followed by a peroration which insisted upon the reality of the pains of slavery:

Vivid as thine the sense of joy and pain,
Thrills in the pulse, and vibrates in each vein;
When hope inspires, behold, as bright a ray,
Illumes their eyes and o'er their features play;
When grief assails, the tears as copious flow,
To mark the soft or agonizing woe.³²

Not always was this assertion of the sensibility of the negro joined with an insistence upon his intellectual ability, as is clear in Hannah More's *Slavery* (1789):

Plead not, in reason's palpable abuse,
Their sense of feeling callous and obtuse;
From heads to hearts lies Nature's plain appeal,
Though few can reason, all mankind can feel.
Though wit may boast a livelier dread of shame
A loftier sense of refinement claim;
Though polish'd manners may fresh wants invent,

³¹The popularity of these arguments is attested by the anonymous *Summary of Evidence* (1792), or *Abstract of Evidence* (1792), in which good resumés of the entire controversy can be found.

³²*Gleanings* (1797), p. 422.

And nice distinctions nicer souls torment;
 Though these on finer spirits heavier fall
 Yet natural evils are the same to all.³³

A primitivistic picture of the negro lent itself likewise to the ironical contrast of savage virtue and civilized vice. The satiric noble savage is frequently used by abolitionists, one of whom taunted the whites as "Those proud lords of the universe, who boast the refinements of the polite arts are guilty of crimes of the blackest hue, . . . crimes unknown in *savage* nations," apparently forgetting the long period of pre-European slave trading.³⁴ "Genius and nobleness of soul," he continued, "are not confined to sex, colour, or country. We frequently discover them in the deep recesses of Africa, and still oftener in the wilds of America." In similar strain James Dunbar wrote in his *Essays on the History of Mankind in Rude and Cultivated States* (1780) that white superiority

if brought to the standard of virtue and felicity . . . may appear very inconsiderable in respect to the populous Asiatic nations . . . and not very great in respect even of the rudest race of men inhabiting the frozen shores of Greenland, or placed beneath the fervour of the vertical sun, along the Guinea coast.³⁵

Crèvecoeur's *Letters of an American Farmer* (1782) traced the influence of gold upon a harmless primitive neighborhood in a manner which presaged Keats' *Isabella*:

With gold, dug from Peruvian mountains, they order vessels to the coast of Guinea; by virtue of that gold, wars, murders, and devastations are committed in some harmless, peaceable African neighborhood, where dwelt innocent people.³⁶

This conception of Africa as a harmless, peaceable neighborhood was necessary for those who wished with Wesley to answer in the negative the question whether Africa was "so remarkably horrid, dreary, and barren, that it is a kindness to deliver them out of it."³⁷ The *Abstract of the Evidence* (1791) devoted an entire chapter to the question: *Whether it be true, as some say, that the Natives of*

³³*Slavery* (1788), *Works* (1854), p. 28.

³⁴*London Magazine*, XLIII (1774), 311-312.

³⁵Pp. 146-147.

³⁶P. 217.

³⁷*Thoughts on Slavery* (1774), p. 7.

Africa are happier in the European Colonies than in their own Country, and used primitivistic accounts of African life to refute the assertion. Adanson's description of Senegal (1759) as exhibiting a "perfect image of pure nature" was especially popular with abolitionists for this purpose.³⁸

Primitivistic conceptions of the negro were thus used for the purpose of refuting two of the leading assertions of pro-slavery writers concerning the sensitivity of the slave to servitude, and the comparative merits of life in the colonies and in Africa. The third of the arguments, that concerning the intellectual and moral equality of the negro, was of such significance in the ideology of the abolition movement as to demand more extended treatment.

II

The problem of the relation of the negro to the white race was the source of a century-old debate, a debate filled with interest for the historian of ideas in that it touched upon pre-Adamitism, upon the idea of the chain of being, and upon early expressions of evolutionary theories.³⁹ Among the most prominent exponents of the intellectual and moral inferiority of the negro were David Hume, Edward Long, historian of Jamaica (1774), and Thomas Jefferson.⁴⁰ Hume had argued in his essay "Of National Characters" (1743) that since none of the slaves "ever discovered any symptoms of ingenuity" they must be "naturally inferior to the whites." Whereas the "most rude and barbarous" of white nations have always manifested some moral and intellectual eminence, the negro race had never had "a civilized nation . . . nor even an individual, eminent either in action or speculation." Such a "uniform and constant difference" seemed to Hume a reasonable indication of "an original distinction between

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 7; *Thoughts on Slavery* (1785), p. 9; *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXX (1791), 710; *Abstract of the Evidence* (1791), p. 118; *Zimao* (1807), p. 35 n.

³⁹Heylyn, *Little Description of the World* (1639), p. 771; Godwyn, *Negro's and Indian's Advocate* (1680); Goldsmith, *History of the Earth* (1774), II, 97-98, 239; Blumenbach, *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* (1775), *Works* (1885) pp. 98-99, 270-271; Dunbar, *Essays on the History of Mankind* (1780), p. 71; Smith, *Essay on Complexion* (Philadelphia, 1787); Dickson, *Letters on Slavery* (1789), pp. 60-71.

⁴⁰*Notes on Virginia* (1782), pp. 255-257. For other assertions of the intellectual shortcomings of the negro see *Gentleman's Magazine*, LXV (1789), 433; *Anti-Jacobin Review*, XVIII (1804), 47; *Edinburgh Review*, VI (1805), 330-331; Bisset, *History of the Slave Trade* (1805), pp. 138-139.

these breeds of men."⁴¹ Long carried on the argument from the point of view of physical differences, asserting that the orang-outang was probably the link between man and the animals, with the negro but slightly above the orang-outang. "Has the Hottentot," asked Long, "a more manly figure than the orang-outang?" It is folly to "insist that man alone, of all other animals, is undiversified." The negroes are "void of genius," and seem almost incapable of making any progress in civility or science. In fact, there is a possibility that the orang-outang might be capable of receiving such education as to make them "excel the inhabitants of *Quaqu*, *Angola*, and *Whidah*."⁴²

Abolitionists met these assertions of negro inferiority by demonstrating on the one hand the moral equality, and even the moral and emotional superiority, of the negro, and on the other hand by arguing that the negro was still in a rude state of nature and had not yet shared in the gradual progress of mankind toward enlightenment. The first of these arguments will be seen to be primitivistic in tone, while the second implies a belief in a theory of progress.

Primitivistic accounts of negro virtue were frequently concluded with pleas for the inherent equality of the negro and white races. Thus Benjamin Rush concluded his account of negro virtue with a statement that such accounts were of value in that the moral natures of the negroes "have been supposed by some to be inferior to those of the inhabitants of Europe,"⁴³ and a contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1791 hoped that his examples of negro virtue might "lift the injured and insulted beings to a sublime height above the level of irrational creatures, to which ignorance and audacity have in vain attempted to reduce them."⁴⁴

It is in this manner that many of the primitivistic passages in abolition poetry should be interpreted—as pleas for the consideration of negro rights rather than as serious expressions of primitivistic idealization. Thus Hannah More adduced illustrations of savage virtue in order to refute

th' illiberal thought that would debase
The native genius of the sable race,

⁴¹*Essays* (1743), *Works* (Edinburgh, 1826), III, 236 n.

⁴²*History of Jamaica* (1774), II, 356-372.

⁴³Rush, *Address upon Slaveholding* (1778), p. 1.

⁴⁴LXX (1791), 711.

and reached the conclusion that

Strong, but luxuriant virtues, boldly shoot
From the wild vigour of a savage root.⁴⁵

And Samuel Pratt demanded, rhetorically:

Whence then this wond'rous difference in our race?
Come, crested Pride, and thy distinction trace:
Lo, from th' Equator to the northern pole,
Tho' colours change, unchangeable the soul!⁴⁶

And Thomas Street, in his *Aura* (1788), showed that negro virtue was sufficient to refute argument of inferiority based upon colour or intellectual backwardness:

What though their skins a *darker tint* my own!
What tho' on *them* bright science dart her frown!
Does that denote them made for us alone?
Alike to them with us, all-bounteous Heav'n
Has *equal* reason, *equal* passions giv'n.⁴⁷

On the other hand progressivistic abolitionists met the assertions of negro inferiority by statements diametrically opposed to these idealized accounts of savage life. With the pro-slavery writers they admitted the stupidity, dishonesty, treachery, and brutality of the negro, but they went on to point out that the negro was still in a state of nature, and that his slow emergence from that state was due to the climate, or to the inaccessibility of Africa, or to the inroads of slave trading. But even the present state of the negro, many of them averred, is no lower than that of our own ancestors. "What were our *venerable* ancestors," exclaimed a contributor to the *Universal Magazine* in 1781, "the Goths and Vandals, from whom we boast our high descent? Uninformed barbarians, in a state of nature, with scarce one beam of reason or of virtue."⁴⁸ Had Hume lived in the days of Augustus, exclaimed James Ramsay, "his northern pride would have been less aspiring."⁴⁹ And Elizabeth Benger in her "Poem on the Abolition" (1808) compared the negro with the aboriginal Briton:

⁴⁵*Slavery* (1788), p. 3. See also Thomas Street, *Aura* (1788), p. 11; "The Negro," *Hibernian Magazine* (1791), 559; "Lines on the Slave Trade," *Gentleman's Magazine*, xc1 (1792), 255; "Mungo's Address," *The Bee*, xiii (1793), 215-216.

⁴⁶*Gleanings* (1797), p. 399.

⁴⁷P. 11.

⁴⁸LXVIII (1781), 4.

⁴⁹*Treatment and Conversion* (1784), p. 199.

Each nation in its shell has once repos'd,
 Its wings unfolded, and its form unclos'd;
 Each country known, the feeble and the strong,
 The magic spell of superstition's song,
 'Mid reason's twilight sounded in her ear,
 Which dup'd the wise, and heroes taught to fear.
 Wild was thy aspect then, immortal Thame,
 When Roman chiefs, the mighty heirs of fame,
 Plung'd in thy rippling flood the pond'rous oar,
 And o'er thy waves the lofty eagles bore.⁵⁰

Hence the abolitionists concluded that the negro was the potential equal of the white. "Both experience, and the nature of man, considered as a presiding rational animal," wrote the author of the *Plan for the Abolition of Slavery* (1772), "forbid us to suppose that there is any original or essential difference in the mental part."⁵¹ "Certain it is," insisted Hewatt in his *History of South Carolina* (1779), "the inhabitants of Africa have the same faculties with those of Europe."⁵² "They are not our equals!" exclaimed Brissot de Warville. "Have they not the same faculties—reason, memory, imagination?"⁵³ Crèvecoeur, after listing instances of negro virtue, concluded that "those hearts in which such noble dispositions can grow, are then like ours."⁵⁴ "As far as I can judge," wrote Ramsay, "there is no difference between the intellects of whites and blacks, but such as circumstances and education naturally produce."⁵⁵ And James Beattie, in his *Essay on Truth* (1770), and again in his *Elements of Moral Science* (1793),⁵⁶ emphasized the virtues and handicaps of the negro race. The *Gentlemen's Magazine* reprinted the earlier of these discussions in 1771 and averred that it proved that negroes "if properly educated, are capable of the same improvements as Whites."⁵⁷

Thus did the negro sympathizers progress from a mere plea for the humane treatment of the unfortunate to a bold assertion of the innate equality of the races, and lead to assertions of the improbability of mankind. As a much incensed defender of the *status quo* exclaimed

⁵⁰LL: 719-729. In *Poems on the Abolition* (1808).

⁵¹P. 5.

⁵²Carroll, *Historical Collections of South Carolina* (1836), I, 354.

⁵³*Examination of Chastellux' Travels* (1782), p. 59.

⁵⁴*Letters of an American Farmer* (1782), p. 222.

⁵⁵*Treatment and Conversion* (1784), p. 203.

⁵⁶*Essay on Truth* (1770; 1809 ed.), pp. 318-321; *Elements of Moral Science, Works* (1817), p. 46.

⁵⁷XLI (1771), 595-596.

in the House of Lords, during the height of English alarm over the Reign of Terror:

... this very proposition for the abolition of the slave trade, not only makes a part in speculation of this new philosophy, but is actually founded on these very principles. . . . For in the very definition of the terms themselves, . . . what does the abolition of the slave trade mean more or less than liberty and equality? what more or less than the rights of man?⁵⁸

III

Having determined that the negro was morally and intellectually equal to the white, many abolitionists carried the argument one step further, asserting that the negro, being equal to other men, was endowed like them with a capacity for moral and intellectual improvement. This theory of improvability bears many resemblances to the idea of perfectibility. The idea of perfectibility, however, presupposes the continuous, limitless, and infinite progress of mankind. Only in a few cases are the statements of abolitionists to be interpreted as expressions of a theory of human perfectibility.

In fact there were many curious and inconsistent relapses into the primitivistic attitude on the one hand, and the cyclical conception of history on the other. After all, one can scarcely expect propagandists to be consistent and impartial philosophers. Primitivistic accounts of the negro frequently ended with perorations indicating the future possibilities of negro improvability. If rude nature be capable of such strength of character, the writers often argued, what heights might that same strength of character attain if it were directed by education. Negro vigour and passion might prove to be one of the potent forces of a new civilization, a force which would gain additional power through the fact that the negro had a pure blood strain.

This argument appeared as early as 1711, when the *Spectator* printed a story illustrating the cruel extremes of negro passion and asked, "What might not that Savage Greatness of Soul . . . be raised to, were it rightly cultivated?" Without education man is "like Marble in the Quarry, which shews none of its inherent Beauties, till the Skill of the Polisher fetches out the Colours." Many a mute inglorious Milton, "The Philosopher, the Saint, or the Hero, the Wise,

⁵⁸Speech of the Earl of Abingdon, April 11, 1793, *Parliamentary History*, xxx, 653.

the Good, or the Great Man," often lies "hid and concealed in a Plebeian, which a proper Education might have disinterred." For this reason it is a great pleasure to read "Accounts of Savage Nations" and to contemplate "those Virtues which are wild and uncultivated."⁵⁹ In similar vein the *London Magazine* in 1745 remarked that had the negroes been blessed with education, "such Genius's, in all Probability, would have exerted themselves in a glorious Manner for the Service of their Country, or all Mankind,"⁶⁰ and James Ramsay asked whether the slaves, had they been allowed to "enjoy the possession of the inalienable rights of humanity," could possibly be supposed "incapable of making a progress in the knowledge of religion, in the researches of reason, or the works of art."⁶¹ "Their hearts are excellent, and contain the seeds of all the virtues," a contributor to the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1791 exclaimed.⁶²

Among the poets who commemorated the abolition of the slave trade, Montgomery believed that though "in these romantic regions man grows wild," it was possible to see "in his flexile limbs untutored grace," and to regard his mind, though "uncultur'd as his plains," yet like those plains "a soil where virtue's fairest blooms might shoot,"⁶³ while James Grahame thought that the intellectual powers of the negro would

Display an elasticity unknown
To men who pace the round of polished life.⁶⁴

The rugged power of the negro race would be intensified, Montgomery believed, because of the purity of their blood:

Muse! take the harp of prophecy: behold!
The glories of a brighter age unfold:
Friends of the outcast! view the accomplish'd plan,
The Negro tow'ring to the height of man.
The blood of Romans, Saxons, Gauls and Danes,
Swell'd the rich fountain of the Briton's veins:
Unmingled streams a warmer life impart,
And quicker pulses to the Negro's heart.⁶⁵

⁵⁹No. 215, Nov. 6, 1711.

⁶⁰xiv, 496.

⁶¹*Treatment and Conversion* (1785), p. 253.

⁶²Lxx (1791), 709.

⁶³"West Indies" (1808), II, ll. 86-102.

⁶⁴"Africa Delivered" (1808), IV, ll. 106-107.

⁶⁵"West Indies" (1808), IV ll. 209-217.

These poets, then, with an enthusiasm pardonable at the time of a great landmark in the history of human emancipation, looked to Africa as the future home of the arts and sciences, a land where the primitive simplicity of savage life was to be combined with the highest attainments of civilization, where the rude vigour of savage blood was to infuse a new life into the activities of the civilized world.

The idea of negro improbability was sometimes linked with a cyclical conception of history. As early as 1737 Richard Savage had argued that the superiority of the European was only temporary. In his poem "On Public Spirit" he threatened the slaveholders:

Revolv'ing empire you and yours may doom,
(Rome all subdued, yet Vandals vanquish'd Rome)
Yes, empires may revolve, give them the day,
And yoke may yoke, and blood may blood repay.⁶⁶

James Ramsay likewise wrote in 1785 that "arts, sciences, and the polished life accompanying them, are slowly progressing through nations and climates,"⁶⁷ and James Anderson predicted that a time might come "when these woolly headed Africans, whom we now affect so much to despise, may once again regain that superiority over the Europeans . . . while the descendants of the proud race of British usurpers may possibly sink to the inferior station among men that their ancestors occupied."⁶⁸ The editor of *The Bee* in 1791 found such visions to be "most exhilarating." "While Europe shall sink into the abyss which luxury at length prepares for all mankind," he exclaimed, "then may Africa prove an asylum to the virtuous part of mankind; and after an interval of ages, she may once more, as she has already done, diffuse the light of knowledge upon Europe."⁶⁹

In most cases assertions of improbability were closely linked with assertions of negro equality. The ability to improve is common to man, these writers argued, and hence is shared by all races. Thus Hewatt, in his *History of South Carolina* (1799), concluded that inasmuch as "the inhabitants of Africa have the same faculties" as Europeans, their minds are "equally capable of cultivation,"⁷⁰ and

⁶⁶*Works* (1775), II, 141-142.

⁶⁷*Treatment and Conversion* (1784), p. 199.

⁶⁸*Observations on Slavery* (1789), pp. 37-38.

⁶⁹VI, 349-350.

⁷⁰Carroll, *Historical Collections*, I, 354.

Ramsay argued that since there was no "difference between the European and African mental powers" there was no reason to believe that "his head, his brains, and his reason would not expand in successive generations of civilized life."⁷¹ Crèvecoeur likewise assumed that "those hearts in which such noble sentiments can grow, are then like our's, they are susceptible of every generous sentiment, of every useful motive of action; they are capable of receiving lights, of imbibing ideas,"⁷² and James Beattie felt that the moral equality of the races was an evidence that the negroes "inherit from nature a constitution of mind very capable of improvement."⁷³

Throughout the movement the improvability of the negro race was held to be practically axiomatic by many writers. The *Family Magazine* in 1788 insisted that the negroes are "as capable of improvement as other men,"⁷⁴ and many abolition pamphlets contained discussions of the moral and intellectual capacity of the race.⁷⁵ Richard Nisbet's *Capacity of Negroes for Moral and Religious Improvement* (1789) was the first of three works which dealt extensively with this topic, the others being La Vallee's *The Negro As There Are Few White Men* (1790) and the Abbé Gregoire's *Enquiry Concerning the Intellectual and Moral Faculties of Negroes* (1808). Nisbet suggested that if one assumed that the negro is "destitute of a capacity for religious and moral improvement" it will be difficult to discover "upon what rational principles we consider ourselves so greatly distinguished above them." The answer is obvious. Improvability is "consistent with the moral beauty of the creation, as well as our own hopes."⁷⁶ In the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1791 there is a clear indication that the contributor did not feel that the improvability of man was infinite. "The mind of man," he asserted, "like the soil he inhabits, has need of culture," and it is unfair for the whites, who have "arrived at the summit" to "look down with contempt upon those beneath."⁷⁷ The

⁷¹*Treatment and Conversion* (1785), p. 225.

⁷²*Letters of an American Farmer* (1782), p. 222.

⁷³*Elements of Moral Science* (1793), p. 46.

⁷⁴II, 766.

⁷⁵James Anderson, *Observations on Slavery* (1789), p. 35; J. B. Moreton, *Manners and Customs in the West Indies* (1790), p. 140; John Gray, *Essay on the Slave Trade* (1792), pp. 26-27; S. Horsley, *Speech in House of Peers* (1799), p. 5.

⁷⁶Pp. 7-8, 29.

⁷⁷LXX, 70.

assumption that the European nations had already "arrived at the summit" is, of course, inconsistent with a thoroughgoing belief in perfectibility. The author of *Thoughts on Civilization and Emancipation* (1792), however, was more optimistic. "We are but little advanced beyond infancy with respect to the extent of our faculties," he exclaimed.

That belief in an indefinite human progress which constitutes a true theory of perfectibility appeared in abolition literature at the close of the eighteenth century. The infinite progress of man was held to be consistent with the teachings of the gospel, with the dictates of reason, and with the conclusions of common sense. In the gospels, Gilbert Wakefield wrote to Wilberforce in 1797, "Jesus hath taught us the *perfectibility* of human nature, beyond any assignable limits." "This most sublime doctrine," he continued, "which the unlearned arrogance of modern philosophy has usurped as its own discovery . . . is laid down with unquestionable precision in the following comprehensive exhortation: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect.*"⁷⁸ Lord Brougham, in his work on *Colonial Policy* (1803) stated that the "gradual improvement and progress in civilization" of the negro was to be expected "according to the general principle of advancement which seems to be an essential part of the human character, and which always works its effects."⁷⁹ The most extreme statement of the improbability of the negro appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1805. In refuting the suggestions of negro inferiority made by the *Examen de l'esclavage*, the reviewer exclaimed that the negroes "have the same propensity to improve, which forms so prominent a feature of the human character over all the rest of the world." Again, "we may be assured . . . that there is nothing in the . . . constitution of the Negro, which renders him an exception to the general character of the species, and prevents him from improving." "No one has yet denied," the reviewer continued, "that all the families of mankind are capable of great improvement." Moreover, though no philosophers have held that this progress was infinite, this conclusion "that no limit can be assigned to its extent or acceleration, is a proposition suggested by a thousand direct considerations, as well as obvious analogies, and de-

⁷⁸Letter to Wilberforce (1797), p. 11.

⁷⁹Quoted in *Annual Review*, II (1803), 325.

serves the name of a general fact, rather than a plausible speculation."⁸⁰

With this positive belief in the improbability of the negro race, illustrated by examples of distinguished negroes,⁸¹ abolitionists laid plans for the commercial exploitation and cultural development of Africa. It was believed that the abolition of the slave trade would usher in a new period of good will among races, and that in a short time Africa would take its place among the seats of civilization. Commerce would thrive, the arts would be encouraged, and the entire civilized world would rejoice in a new-found culture and prosperity.

The enthusiasm with which these visions were embraced indicates the widespread popularity of the idea of social progress, and furnishes a clue to one of the motivating forces of eighteenth-century humanitarianism. No nation, no race, no class was to be exempt from the glorious future which a life of political liberty and social opportunity could afford. With the zest of the French revolutionists the anti-slavery writers envisioned a most promising future for the negro race.

These visions of commercial exploitation, reminiscent of Defoe's *Essay upon the Trade to Africa* (1711), his *Brief Account of the Present State of the African Trade* (1713), and his *Plan of the English Commerce* (1728), led to the establishment of the Sierra Leone colony in 1790. Despite the expenses and misfortunes which attached to this project, the abolitionists continued to stress the commercial advantages of colonization, partly to offset the conservative cry against the destruction of wealth through abolition. The argument of commercial advantage echoed throughout the magazines. "If Africa were civilized, what a noble market for English manufactures," exclaimed the *Literary Magazine* in 1790.⁸² To the *Analytical Review* the plan opened a prospect of "immense countries, in which the manufactures

⁸⁰VI (1805), 344, 345, 347.

⁸¹For Toussaint, see *Edinburgh Review*, VI (1805), 346; Rainsford, *History of Hayti* (1805), p. 250; Wordsworth, "To Toussaint l'Overture," *Morning Post*, February 2, 1803, *Poems* (1807). For Phillis Wheatley, see Jefferson, *Notes on Virginia* (1782), pp. 257-258; *Thoughts on Slavery* (1785), pp. 14-15; Ramsay, *Treatment and Conversion* (1785), p. 203; Clarkson, *Slavery and Commerce* (1786), p. 127; Imlay, *Topographical Description Western Territory* (1792), p. 214; Davis, *Travels in the United States* (1803), p. 87. For Ignatius Sancho, see *Family Magazine*, III (1789), 204-216. For Banneker, see *The Bee*, XIII (1793), 291-296. For a general discussion, see Blumenback, *Contributions to Natural History* (1795), quoted in *Philosophical Magazine*, III (1799), 141-147.

⁸²VI, 208.

of Great Britain might be exchanged with almost unlimited profit.”⁸³ The author of the *Summary View of the Question* (1792) thought that this trade would “amply repay us for the loss of America” and “break the monopoly of the Dutch”;⁸⁴ the *Philosophical Magazine* in 1798 considered the work of the African explorers of utmost importance in paving the way “for the civilization of its inhabitants”;⁸⁵ and the *Anti-Jacobin Review* opined in 1800 that though much remained to be done, the negroes “have minds capable of expansion and improvement” and that from African commerce “the most beneficent effects to the cause of humanity, of religion, and of human nature, might be expected to follow.”⁸⁶ The translator of Damberger’s *Travels* (1801) thought that the author had opened “to the view new sources of wealth, which avarice itself could scarcely exhaust,”⁸⁷ and De-grandpre, the African traveller, felt that the Africans would regard white merchants “as benevolent deities, who, coming to occupy the land, instead of selling *them*, would teach them salvation.”⁸⁸

Not only would colonization accrue to the commercial advantage of Great Britain, but the cultural development of Africa would benefit civilization in general. “A great era is opening on the earth,” stated the preface to Roscoe’s *Wrongs of Africa* (1788), “and the close of the eighteenth, like that of the fifteenth century, will probably be marked in future times, as a period in which a sudden accession of light burst on the human mind.” Progress is now universal, and is no longer “confined to the recesses of philosophy.” It is hence quite probable that

the principles of political science may soon undergo an universal change; that probity and good faith may take place of fraud and chicanery in the intercourse of states . . . and hatred and bloodshed be exchanged for confidence and peace.⁸⁹

James Stanfield depicted the glorious development of African civilization in his *Guinea Voyage* (1789):

⁸³P. 9.

⁸⁴VI, 268.

⁸⁵I, 192.

⁸⁶VI, 272.

⁸⁷Pref., pp. vii-viii.

⁸⁸*Monthly Review*, N. S., XXXVII (1802), 452.

⁸⁹*Monthly Review*, LXXVIII (1788), 139.

Quick through the joyful land the tidings ring;
Rejoicing crowds th' enfranchised blessing sing.
Science awaken'd leads the free-born strain;
And arts and commerce follow in the train.

Rear'd by protecting laws new cities rise,
And heave their turrets to the lucid skies,
Trade lifts his trident o'er the silver tide,
New harbours open, bids his navies ride;
Sees, unpolluted by oppression's hand,
His honest wealth stream through the joyous land.⁹⁰

Thomas Campbell shared the optimism of the period when in his *Pleasures of Hope* (1799) he prophesied the social progress of all the backward races of the globe. America will become a new Arcadia:

Come bright Improvement! on the car of Time,
And rule the spacious world from clime to clime;
Thy handmaid arts shall every wild explore,
Trace every wave, and culture every shore.
On Erie's banks, where tigers steal along,
And the dread Indian chants a dismal song,
Where human fiends on midnight errands walk,
And bathe in brains the murderous tomahawk,
There shall the flocks on thymy pastures stray,
And shepherds dance at Summer's opening day.

This progress shall take place throughout the world:

Where'er degraded Nature bleeds and pines,
From Guinea's coast to Sibir's dreary mines.
Truth shall pervade th' unfathomed darkness there,
And light the dreadful features of despair.⁹¹

The poets who commemorated the abolition of the slave trade in 1808 were perhaps most optimistic concerning the future development of Africa. James Grahame hoped that the white races would make restitution to the negro through education; the effects of this instruction would be remarkable:

Where scattered hovels lay, fair towns arise
With turrets, spires, and chiming bells that call
The crowding throngs to fill the house of prayer.
Where erst the native plied the light canoe,
He steers the loaded ship. Nor useful arts alone
Are cherished; music from afar is borne,
Wafted by northern gales; and on the banks
Of Gambis's tide the Scottish seaman starts
To hear Lochaber's strain on Flodden Field.⁹²

⁹⁰P. 36. See also "The Progress of Learning," *Anthologia Hibernica*, II (1793), 63.

⁹¹*Works* (1845), pp. 38-39.

⁹²"Africa Delivered," IV, ll. 85-95, *Poems on the Abolition* (1808).

At the conclusion of the anti-slave-trade movement a plan for African civilization came from the pen of a distinguished author—Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In a review of Clarkson's *History of the Abolition* (1808), appearing in the *Edinburgh Review*, Coleridge contrasted the agility of the negro with the stolid nature of the Indian, and concluded that the Africans were "more versatile, more easily modified, than perhaps any other known race." Hence it would be wise for the government to enter upon a program of colonization, where every colony "instead of being, as hitherto, a magazine of death and depravity, would finally become a center of civilization."⁹³

Though an apologist for the slave trade asserted in 1805 that no writers "of literary eminence" had "yet embarked in the cause," the active interest of Wesley, Paine, Newton, Priestley, Crèvecoeur, Beattie, as well as that of most of the leading poets of the time, indicates widespread interest in this humanitarian movement. But this pro-slavery writer was more discerning when he exclaimed against "*those levelling principles from which abolitionists derived a great part of their abstract reasonings*,"⁹⁴ for the literature of the abolition movement is pregnant with suggestions of the doctrines of human equality and of social progress.

Despite these progressivistic leanings, abolitionists testified in their writings to the continued fascination which the concepts of primitivism exercised upon the eighteenth-century mind. So popular were these pictures of idyllic savagery that most of the abolition poets used the stock phrases of primitivism throughout their work. In many cases, however, these expressions of primitivistic idealization were but stages in the argument for negro equality, and should be so interpreted.

It is perhaps in the expressions of the ideas of human perfectibility and of social progress that the literature of the abolition movement is of greatest interest to the historian of ideas. Believing that social progress was consonant with the dictates of reason, and even with the doctrines of the gospel, some abolitionists looked forward to a new age of enlightenment, in which the arts and sciences would penetrate the deepest fastnesses of the dark continent. The Sierra Leone colony, the abolition of the slave trade, and the final emancipation of the negro, stand as monuments to their vision and enterprise.

⁹³XII (1808), 376-377.

⁹⁴Robert Bisset, *History of the Slave Trade* (1805), II, 279.

